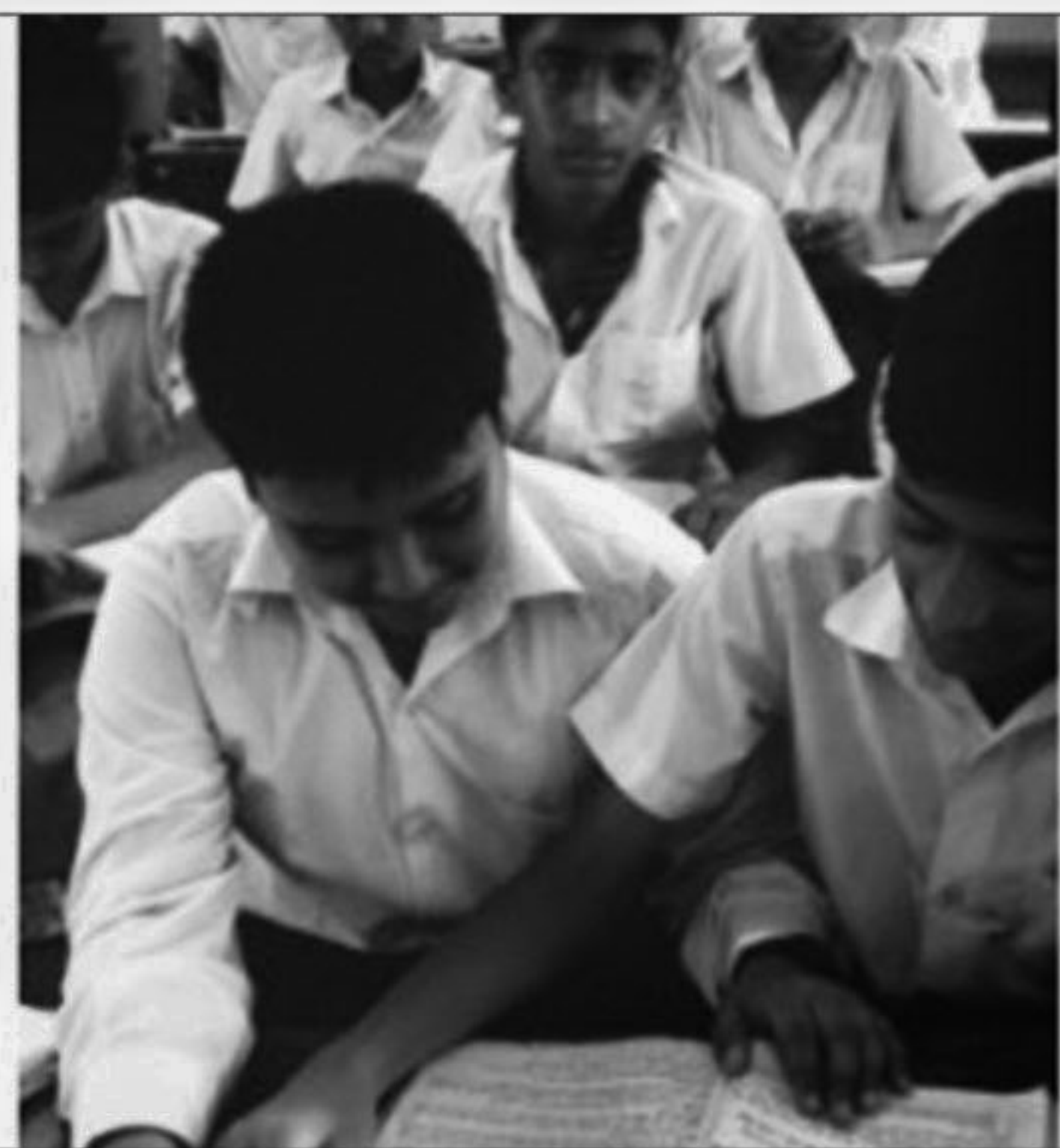




Education must make a complete person.



ZAHEDI KHAN

Taking to the seas

Due to favourable geographical location together with availability of technically knowledgeable and competent personnel, skilled and semi-skilled workers, and past heritage, the ship building industry of Bangladesh has started its journey towards export.

MD. MASHUD KARIM

BANGLADESH has been blessed with more than 200 rivers with a total length of about 22,155km as well as a long coastline on the Bay of Bengal. We forgot that Bangladesh had a prosperous and glorious heritage in building ships since ancient times. Nowadays, we are surprised to know that Bangladesh was the centre for building ocean-going ships in Asia between the 15th and 17th centuries.

In the early 19th century, the shipyards of Chittagong built many commercial ships of up to 1,000 tons, and also British navy vessels that participated in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

Despite her long heritage, Bangladesh has failed to keep pace and consistency with the continuous technological development of global shipbuilding industry. Though late, it is a good sign that the Bangladesh government has considered it as a thrust sector and expressed keen interest in promoting this sector with a view to including this prestigious item in the list of our exportable goods.

Necessary steps are being undertaken by the government to make this country a cost-effective destination for global buyers dealing in ships, ship machineries, fittings and marine equipments. The prime objectives of developing a healthy shipbuilding sector are to resolve unemployment problem, boost foreign currency earnings and achieve substantial economic growth, thereby contributing significantly to poverty alleviation.

There are presently more than 200 shipbuilding and ship repairing yards in Bangladesh.

Among them, Ananda Shipyards and Slipways Ltd. (ASSL) is the most modern and largest privately owned shipyard. It is well organised in terms of production and assembly flow lines, and has facilities for building ships of up to about 10,000 DWT.

Due to favourable geographical location together with availability of technically knowledgeable and competent personnel, skilled and semi-skilled workers, and past heritage, the ship building industry of Bangladesh has started its journey towards export.

It is worth mentioning that ASSL has exported a number of ocean-going ships to a high-end market like Denmark and Mozambique through international competition. Other shipyards in Bangladesh also got orders from Denmark, Germany and Norway for building small to medium size vessels.

This trend is expected to continue for at least the next fifteen years, maybe longer, because of cheap labour. The low-tech oriented ships such as bulk carriers can also be built competitively with low labour costs, which is a big advantage in Bangladesh. The opportunity that is now knocking at the door must not be lost due to lack of priority or understanding of the prospects.

The shipbuilding industry needs heavy infrastructural equipment and well-trained workers for design and manufacturing. In addition, it needs backward and forward linkage industries, steel and electricity businesses, social infrastructure and logistics, and financing support.

No nation can survive in such a competitive field like shipbuilding without technological enhancements through invention. It is one of the ways for competing in shipbuilding industry with the giant shipbuilding nations like Japan, Korea, China and Vietnam.

Bangladesh has got a most prestigious centre of excellence, Buet, for engineering education. We are very fortunate that this university has a Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering department where the most meritorious and talented students of this country are studying.

The faculty members of this department are also highly qualified and have had their highest education from various renowned universities in the world. But the department has some limitations in R&D activities in this sector.

In order to produce knowledgeable, competent and skilled manpower in shipbuilding, the department needs extra support from the government and also from industrialists for establishment of research facilities like Towing Tank (Ship Model Testing Basin), Cavitation Tunnel, Circulating Water Channel etc.

Although productivity of Bangladeshi work force is important in order to compete in the international market, there is no alternative to technological enhancement for establishing Bangladesh as a shipbuilding nation, otherwise, it may not be possible to stay in this sector permanently.

The government should be committed to support and develop this sector. Favourable policies like subsidies, R&D, and educational investments, should also be made by the government for Bangladesh to become a shipbuilding nation and recover its lost heritage.

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Getting ready to ride the waves.

Learning about life

The education policy offers important recommendations that cannot be implemented overnight. National consensus is imperative for translating the suggestions into reality, for which continuity of the stages of completion has to be ensured -- unlike what happened in the past.

GOLAM SARWAR CHOWDHURY

THE recently announced national education policy provides one of the most comprehensive guidelines to all levels of education in Bangladesh since the announcement of the Kudrate Khuda education policy soon after independence.

It is unfortunate that as many as six education policies were recommended since Bangladesh came into being, of which only one, that of 2000, was in the process of implementation before being scrapped after the Awami League government was voted out of power.

The new education policy sheds light on almost every aspect of education, starting from the primary level and ending with higher education. The policy suggests harmonising of primary, secondary and higher-secondary education, aiming at eliminating the existing discrimination that makes education disparate and multi-streamed.

The recommendation to modernise madrasa education by incorporating science and technology in the curriculum is a prominent feature of the policy. To our satisfaction, opposition political parties, including religious outfits, have not made too much of a fuss about the suggestions on madrasa education.

Another important recommendation is

the study of religion at the secondary level for students of all faiths. While this cannot be avoided given our social realities, it is important that students of any religion get an opportunity to know about the principles and values of other faiths. A comparative understanding of the principles of different faiths will ensure tolerance and appreciation of all religions in a multi-religious and pluralistic country such as Bangladesh.

The government has to ensure that all students get an opportunity to know about religious practices in all communities, which will eventually reinforce the secular character of our society. Bigotry and hatred of other religions can be prevented by making it mandatory to study the basic principles of all religions practiced in Bangladesh.

The education policy refers more than once to human values at all levels of education. This is absolutely essential if we are to create worthy human beings who will always espouse the essence of humanity once they complete their education and begin to contribute their knowledge to the larger society.

Following the principles laid down in the education policy, students studying the sciences at the tertiary level should be given an opportunity to study a course that could instill humanism, which will consequently pay off in a big way after their graduation.

A course combining history and the

humanities should be included in the curriculum of medical, technological and legal studies so that students of these disciplines are not deprived of learning the core values of humanity.

The current practice of branching out into different fields after the end of higher secondary education has its limits. Students studying their subjects of choice are deprived of any further formal training in essential subjects that they need to study in order to become responsible citizens of the country.

In US and many other developed countries, undergraduate students have to take a number of courses, either in history or in literature, even if their major subject is engineering or accounting. Similarly, a student majoring in English or history has to get formal training in the sciences to make education even-handed and inclusive.

In keeping with the suggestions contained in the 2009 education policy, universities can introduce this idea of liberal education. In this case, students can gain the ability of looking at life from different perspectives instead of the current practice of total concentration on the major discipline. This traditional approach restricts students from gaining important knowledge necessary for a fuller understanding of society and the human condition.

The education policy has also addressed the need of English in our education system and recommended that the subject be taught from the primary to university levels. This, of course, is realistic in today's global context in which proficiency in English is an important prerequisite for success in professional life.

What, however, must be ensured is proper teaching of English at schools, colleges and universities all over the country. At present, only a few renowned institutions, mostly in

urban areas, have the wherewithal of imparting quality teaching of English. If students throughout the country have to learn English properly, trained teachers will be needed, without which teaching English effectively will be extremely difficult.

The Education Commission has also suggested that the GCE O and A Level certificates be made equivalent to S.S.C and H.S.C respectively. This, of course, is a welcome suggestion that will go a long way in solving a thorny problem that has been complicating our education system for a number of years.

If the nation wants to get the services of students with a British education, they have to be given an equal opportunity to find placements in the country's public universities, medical colleges and engineering colleges. At present, they face an unfair competition with their Bengali medium peers because the placement tests are based on the H.S.C and S.S.C syllabi.

The education policy offers important recommendations that cannot be implemented overnight. National consensus is imperative for translating the suggestions into reality, for which continuity of the stages of completion has to be ensured -- unlike what happened, in the past. In a democracy, changes in government are always a possibility. This however, cannot be a pretext to shelve an education policy, as has been done many times in the past.

The Kabir Chowdhury Education Policy has provided the nation with well thought-out suggestions as to how the nation's education system ought to function. It is now up to the government to make sure that it implements most of the recommendations of the policy within its present term in office.

Golam Sarwar Chowdhury is Professor of English at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

Sultana's Dream: Still a distant Utopia?

One hundred years after *Sultana's Dream*, it is way past time to make an accurate analysis of whether we as a nation have achieved what Begum Rokeya set forth for our women. Our present government has taken some of the measures that Begum Rokeya urged us to take for women empowerment.

ZEENAT KHAN

BEGUM Rokeya, a social reformer, prolific writer and pioneer of feminist movement in the sub-continent India, wrote *Sultana's Dream* in English to impress her husband. It was first published in a Madras-based magazine called *Indian Ladies Magazine*, and is considered "a classic of feminist Utopian fiction."

She was born in 1888 into a prominent traditional zamindar Muslim family in the village of Pariabondh, Rangpur. She fought for the advancement of women when Muslim women in the sub-continent had to remain in *pardah*. At that time, the life of a Muslim woman was very restricted and repressed.

Begum Rokeya's parents were progressive minded for their time. It was her eldest brother, Ibrahim, who saw her love for learning and helped her to begin her education in both English and Bangla. At the time, the preferred languages for the upper-class Muslims were Arabic and Farsi.

Begum Rokeya was married at the age of 16 to an Urdu speaking magistrate. It was a love match, which was not a common thing during that period. Her husband Sayed Shakhwat Hossain also supported her quest for education. He encouraged her to write about women's issues that were not talked about. Begum Rokeya, from early on, realised that to be emancipated a woman had to be

educated. So she began her life's work.

She was a lone voice fighting for the freedom and intellectual advancement of Muslim women in India. She wrote: "We constitute half of the society. If we remain backward can the society move forward? If somebody's legs are bound up how far can she walk? Indeed, the interest of women and men are not different. Their goal of life and ours are the same."

With those powerful words Begum Rokeya set the tone for feminist movement. Because of her thinking, women are now seeking equal rights and helping in the development of our nation.

In *Sultana's Dream* she creates a futuristic ideal world, a "feminist utopia," where women are out of the segregated *zenana* (*pardah*). They run everything and men are secluded in quarters called *mardana*. The paradox used here is: "If you lock up someone for their protection from yourself, shouldn't you be the one who's locked up?"

When *Sultana's Dream* was published in 1905, the biographical note in the edition said that her husband's reaction after reading the story was: "A splendid revenge."

She wrote: "What we want is neither alms nor gift of favour. It is our inborn right. Our claim is not more than Islam gave women 1,300 years ago." She broke all barriers, and struggled throughout her life for a better society for women who had no voice. She led the way to empowering and enlightening

women.

Begum Rokeya founded the Sakawat Memorial Girls' School in Calcutta when Muslim girls did not go to school. She went from door to door to convince parents of the need of education for a Muslim girl. At first, only five families were persuaded and the number of students was only 5.

With her realisation that in order to be independent women need to be educated first -- she led this one woman campaign against tradition, prejudice, laws of the land, and a whole lot more. When a woman becomes educated, she does not depend on the fathers, brothers or the husbands.

Over and over she had to send this message out. Her writings were mainly based on that premise. In order to gain economic freedom she also encouraged women to revive craft industries. In that sense she also paved the way for small-scale industries for women.

Begum Rokeya's writings demonstrated a confident woman with talent and knowledge.

It has been more than one hundred years since the publication of *Sultana's Dream*, yet the prospect of education for a girl in rural Bangladesh is a distant dream. With all the books that are written about gender and development, the fact remains that rural girls are still uneducated.

Throughout history cultural barriers and stigma have excluded women from receiving education or earning equal pay to men. This may be viewed as "a weapon to keep the girls in a relegated state so that it is possible to establish a male-dominated society and women are consigned to domestic work only."

To transform a society from centuries-old barriers takes time. In the case of Bangladesh, it is taking too much time. In recent years school enrollment of rural girls

has improved, but they are forced to drop out as soon as a marriage proposal comes along. They have to enter into an early marriage.

According to a recent Unicef report, almost 50% of the rural girls are married by age 15, and 60% become mothers by age 19. When that happens, a woman cannot become a productive member of a society. Without education they cannot generate any income and become a liability in most households. Even though our religion is very clear on women's position, they are often discriminated against.

Many years after Begum Rokeya's fight for oppressed women, other conscientious women in Bangladesh emerged to take up the cause. The pioneers of human rights in Bangladesh, like late Salma Sobhan along with Dr. Hamida Hossain and Advocate Sultana Kamal (to name a few), made a lot of changes to enhance the lives of oppressed women. They are working tirelessly to improve the conditions and ensuring that equal rights for women are recognised in our society.

One hundred years after *Sultana's Dream*, it is way past time to make an accurate analysis of whether we as a nation have achieved what Begum Rokeya set forth for our women. Our present government has taken some of the measures that Begum Rokeya urged us to take for women empowerment.

Our current government under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, along with other female ministers, should embrace more aggressive policies regarding compulsory education for girls, gender equality, and equal pay, which will bring in a big return in enhancing social and economic development in our impoverished land. Only then can our women be truly free.

Zeenaat Khan is a freelance writer from the Washington, D.C metropolitan area.